

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Paul writes to the Romans today, but he may as well have been writing to us today. Paul writes: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed." Transformed through the renewal of our minds, transformed in discerning what is the will of God, for by definition the will of God is those things that are good and acceptable and perfect. Imagine if we could say of our lives, of our society that they were good and acceptable and perfect? Certainly there are times when we approach these things, where we feel that things are good and acceptable (although I certainly think of acceptable as a state of settling, not what Paul had in mind) but we often fall short (or at least believe we fall short) of perfect, and why is that? Why do we struggle so much with knowing what is good and acceptable and perfect and seeing that made our shared reality?

I think we struggle because too often we conform to this world. I think we struggle because the world encourages us to conform, from the very start. We are told what to wear, who we get to play with or sit at lunch with, how to practice our faith, what policies we must agree with if we belong to a political party. This world is very good at getting us to conform, because it is in conforming that we keep the status quo, it is in conforming that the system is allowed to continue unabated. But, is this a good thing? When our minds are renewed and we discern the will of God, discern for what is good and acceptable and perfect, do we discern that our current culture, our current society is that good and acceptable and perfect world that God wants to see? And if it isn't, what then?

First, according to Paul, we need to check ourselves, check our arrogance, check our privilege, check our conformity masquerading as God's will. It is only through sober

judgment that we must think, sober judgment that must guide us in discerning. It is far too easy to think highly of ourselves, to praise ourselves for having knowledge of the world, for knowing what is right and what is wrong, to see ourselves as elevated above others because we are living a more Godly life than they. We think much higher of ourselves than we ought, because when we think too highly of ourselves, we forget that God needs to be part of the conversation, we forget that we need others in order to make in this world the good and acceptable and perfect that we are called to discern, create, live. And, as Paul makes clear to note, this applies to everyone, for everyone is susceptible to this tendency, everyone is susceptible to the reality of elevating ourselves above our station.

For, though we are ourselves one body, we are but part of one larger body in Christ. This is a body that has many varied, distinct, diverse, different parts. These parts do not have the same functions as us or as the many other parts that come together, but collectively as a whole we are all one body in Christ. This is our relationship to God in pretty easy to understand metaphor. It's so good in fact, that it's not the only time that Paul uses it, using it also (and in more depth) in his first letter to the Corinthians. And, while we all come together to make the one body of Christ, we all also interact with one another, our bodies are shaped, influenced by our interactions with one another, and so it must be said that we are also many parts, one body of one another. This is the relationship that we should have with each other. A relationship that recognizes the unique gifts and beauty that you possess from God, gifts that when combined with my gifts, enable us together to enlighten this world, to work for that good and acceptable and perfect reality that God has destined for creation.

As we come together, whether within the one body of Christ, or as the many parts that build up one another, we begin to discover the many gifts that we can offer to each other and to this world. We all have been given gifts by God. Spiritual, practical, gifts that enable us to do the work of renewing minds, of discerning together that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. The many gifts that exist are on display when we work for the betterment of the body. Some of these gifts are self-identified, we know within ourselves that we hold certain gifts, and others we do not. And, some of these gifts are identified by the collective whole. The body recognizes within itself the various members and holds up the gifts they have, even if they do not know they have them. The fingers do not know they can play the piano, for example, but when the body comes together with them to lift them up, that gift is fully realized. Each of these gifts, each of these small parts of our parts, are to be celebrated. They are what make us unique individuals. They are what make us different from the next person. They are what we can offer, and it is in their offering that we make the body whole.

It is in our differences, differences of knowledge born out of formal education but also cultural experience, differences of ability born out of innate skill but also dedicated practice, differences of understanding born out of our upbringing but also our ability to think critically for ourselves, differences that make us who we are and allow us to know that we are a truly unique part, counted among the many members that make the one body. Because of this, these differences must be celebrated. It is only through our differences that we can see how we are made fully and wholly one with Christ. When we dismiss those differences, when we try to be conformed, we all try to fulfill the role of one singular part,

leaving the rest of the body incomplete. When we try to turn away a member, turning away their unique functions, we are turning away a piece of the body. In rejecting that piece, we are rejecting the wholeness that we seek in following Christ. Without that wholeness, we cannot function in this world emotionally, spiritually, because we are neglecting to listen to a part that we are afraid of, that we don't agree with, that we don't think we need, that we simply don't like.

It is not up to us to reject parts of the body. This is somewhat easier to handle when it comes to the reality of the body of Christ, because ultimately that decision is only in God's hands, and if we have faith, then we know that we must trust in God. This is a lot harder to handle when we talk about letting our own bodies be influenced by one another. Why would I listen to that person who is not of me, who does not live a life I agree with? Why would I allow their presence to enter into me and be a positive influence on me, when I do not know them, do not trust them, do not agree with them?

We must, because that is how our minds are renewed, how we keep from being conformed to this world. We must, because that is how we can more fully know God. This can be a hard reality to accept. And, sometimes we will be fooled into letting parts of the body that seek homogeneity influence us into thinking that we are celebrating all the members of the body, by rejecting the others as "bad parts." But, if we can push past this desire to be conformed to this world, if we can push past this mistrust we often place in those body parts we desperately need, parts that are good and acceptable and perfect but still parts we continue to be afraid of, then in our incorporation of those parts, we begin to discern that will of God that is good and acceptable and perfect. Amen.